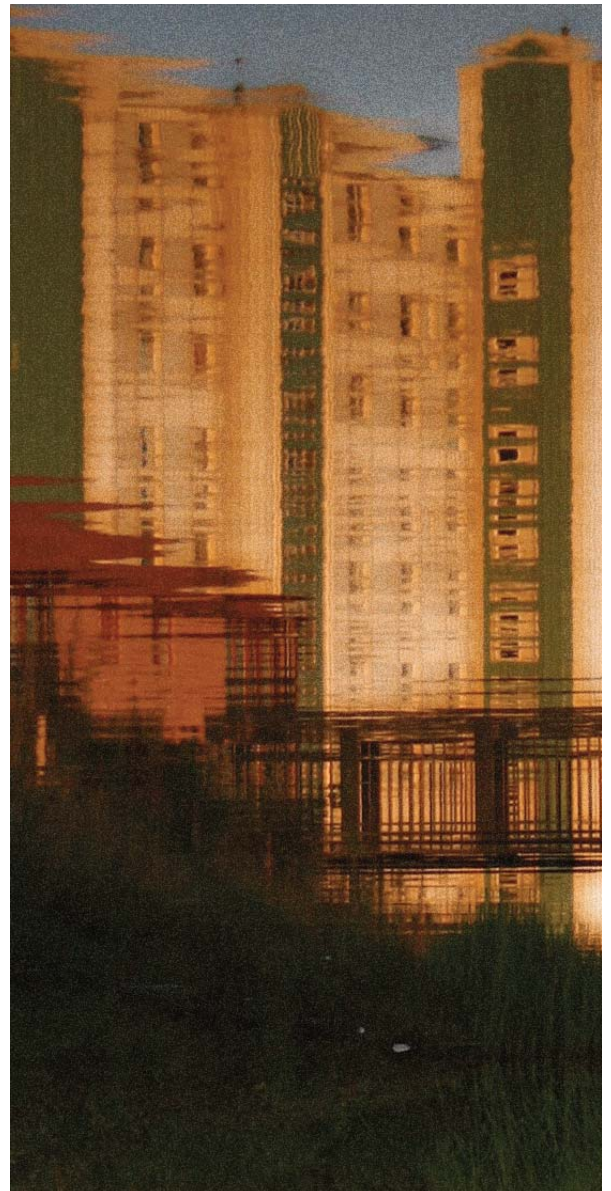


Tackling Health Inequalities and Poverty: a consultation with Scotland's Third Sector

Summary

*carried out by
Voluntary Health Scotland
for the Scottish Government
Public Health and
Wellbeing Directorate*

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Summary

Established in October 2007, The Ministerial Task Force on Health Inequalities undertook to agree priorities for cross-cutting government action to reduce health inequalities in Scotland, through a cross-cutting, cross-sectoral approach.

The Task Force priorities of supporting children's early years, enhancing mental health and wellbeing, increasing education and learning opportunities and employability, all through a multi-sector approach will contribute to current Government economic and health strategies. The Task Force is due to report in June 2008.

Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) was asked by the Government Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate to scope the views of the third sector on current Government approaches to combating poverty and health inequalities, identify actions that should be taken by the different sectors and provide examples of effective third sector initiatives.

In a two-phase approach, VHS conducted an online survey of third sector organisations, using their 123 responses to facilitate a ministerial roundtable discussion.

Third sector participants were broadly in support of Government priorities for tackling poverty and its effects on health, adding other issues and groups with whom the sector works best as meriting policies and action. While supporting the need for early intervention, participants gave equal weight to addressing the structural causes of poverty.

Participants emphasised their strengths in working with many marginalised groups, complementing Government approaches to reducing the impact of poverty on the early years. These included skills in supporting individuals and groups to lift themselves out of poverty through raising self-esteem and confidence alongside structural measures to remove barriers to income enhancement and employment.

Despite some reservations about the success of recent 'closing the gap' initiatives, respondents believed that targeting extra efforts at the poorest groups was essential, citing many examples of their own successful initiatives.

Recommendations for action included making explicit the urgency of explaining and tackling poverty in Scotland, establishing the primary importance of partnership working, making better use of new planning structure to do this, aligning resources more closely through joint budgeting and shared outcomes, thus maximising returns on investment. Finally, performance management of programmes which allow the added value brought by the third sector to the alleviation of poverty and reducing health inequalities was seen as essential.